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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Sixteenth session
13-31 January 1997

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS SIXTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Aurora Javate DE DIOS (Philippines)

Addendum

III. REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

1. The former Chairperson of the Committee, Ms. Ivanka Corti, reported on her activities as Chairperson since the fifteenth session of the Committee. She also reflected on developments with regard to the Committee which had occurred during the four-year period of her chairpersonship.

2. Ms. Corti indicated that, since the fifteenth session, she had participated in the celebration of International Women's Day at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), where she took part in a round table on violence against women in all its forms. She also participated in a seminar on violence against women hosted by the French Ministry of Justice, held from 8 to 10 March 1996. Moreover, she participated in two training sessions at the International Labour Organization (ILO) Centre in Turin, as well as conferences of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Venice and Tunis.

3. Ms. Corti also attended the fortieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women as an observer, and in particular, the meetings, held in parallel of the open-ended working group on the draft Optional Protocol, which she described to the members of the Committee. She indicated that both the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council had

adopted resolutions providing for the attendance of a member of the Committee as a resource person at the meetings of the Optional Protocol working group at the forty-first session of the Commission.

4. Ms. Corti briefed members of the Committee on the meeting of persons chairing human rights treaty bodies held at the Centre for Human Rights in September 1996, at which she had also been elected chairperson. Topics discussed at the meeting included the relationship of specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies with treaty bodies, and the role of NGOs in the work of those bodies.

5. Ms. Corti discussed the steps she had taken during the year to promote links between the Committee on the one hand and the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system on the other. She and three other members of the Committee had participated in a joint meeting of the Committee with the Committee on the Rights of the Child sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and held at Cairo from 18 to 20 November 1996. The meeting had constituted an important step towards strengthened cooperation between the human rights treaty bodies. The former Chairperson also reported on the meeting with Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, at which concrete proposals for future cooperation with the Committee were put forward.

6. Ms. Corti reminded the Committee of the suggestion she had made to Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), following the International Conference on Population and Development that UNFPA should work with the Committee to consider the human rights implications of the Conference's Programme of Action and its relevance to the work of the Committee and the human rights treaty bodies. Those suggestions resulted in the Round Table on Human Rights Approaches to Women's Health, with a focus on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights, co-sponsored by UNFPA, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Human Rights Committee, held at Glen Cove, New York, from 9 to 11 December 1996. This was the first such meeting of chairpersons of treaty bodies on thematic issues. It was followed by further discussions between Dr. Sadik and members of the Committee. Ms. Corti also commended the steps that had been taken by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to promote both the Convention and the Committee.

7. Expressing the view that she had felt honoured to represent such an extraordinary Committee of women devoted to the defence of women's human rights, Ms. Corti recalled that when she had first assumed the chairpersonship of the Committee measures were needed to make the Convention and the Committee better known. The Vienna, Cairo and Beijing conferences had provided an important framework for this work. She pointed to the various achievements of the Committee during this period, beginning with the formulation, with UNESCO, of the manifesto "Towards a Gender-Inclusive Culture through Education". She reminded members of the extraordinary one-week session organized by a State party (Spain) in May 1995, and the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention. She noted the growing interest of NGOs in the work of the Committee, specifically mentioning the participation of a number of Committee members in workshops at the NGO Forum to the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the work of the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW), the International Human Rights Law Clinic of the City University of New York Law

School and the International Human Rights Law Group in promoting the Convention and supporting the work of the Committee. She also described in this context the Round Table on Women's Health as a Human Right organized by the Commonwealth Medical Association at Toronto in October 1996, in which members of tne Committee participated.

8. Ms. Corti drew attention to developments in various areas of the Committee's work during her chairpersonship. She noted in particular general recommendation 21, equality in marriage and family relations and the fact that the Committee had updated its reporting guidelines at its fifteenth session to take account of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

9. Ms. Corti congratulated Ms. Khan on her election as Chairperson and noted that her task would be a challenging one. She reminded members that the Committee will now meet twice yearly and that its work required rationalization. Steps needed to be taken to reduce the backlog of reports awaiting consideration by the Committee and to establish permanent relations with NGOs and encourage their greater involvement in the Committee's work. The new rules of procedure required finalization and a permanent relationship needed to be forged with the non-treaty human rights mechanism, and in particular, with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. She noted the importance of the establishment of the Women's Rights Unit in the Division for the Advancement of Women and the appointment of the Chief of that section, whom she encouraged to maintain close links with the Chairperson of the Committee.

10. Finally, Ms. Corti thanked current and former Committee members, the members of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the staff of the Centre for Human Rights, NGOs and the various academics who had contributed to the popularization and appreciation of the Convention. In conclusion, she expressed appreciation for the solidarity of all women, which was fundamental to the Committee's success.

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